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ABSTRACT

Community college teachers should be student-centered and should have a humanistic perspective that sees learning as possible for anyone under the right conditions, an ability to be flexible, creative, and innovative, knowledge of a wide range of teaching strategies, as well as subject matter, and an ability to communicate effectively. When a college demands these qualities in its new teachers, it will assure a future institution that is people-centered, one which lives up to the philosophical promises of equal opportunity and free accessibility. (RT)

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"And gladly wolde he lerne, and gladly teche":
Desirable Values for Community-College Faculty

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On the fictional pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket and God recounted in Geoffrey Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales was a Clerk from Oxford studying for a position in the church. Possessing a lean horse, a threadbare tunic, little money, but armed with a love of philosophy and a library of books, the Clerk "gladly wolde . . . lerne, and gladly teche."¹ Surprisingly enough, Chaucer's fourteenth-century teacher has some relevance to the twentieth-century community-college faculty member. Although some of the nearly 200,000 full- and part-time community-junior college faculty² are not threadbare, have rather stout horses transporting them, are well supported with funds, and have a distinct hatred of the philosophical, there remain many who not only incidentally fit the Clerk's strained material circumstances but also are thoroughly committed to learning and love to teach.

But, sadly enough, there are still not enough true Clerks at work in the community-junior colleges today. Some do not have the knowledge to teach effectively: knowledge of current subject matter or a interdisciplinary synthesis; awareness of innovative teaching techniques; understanding of the unique function and philosophy of the comprehensive community college, the nature of its diverse clientele, and their professional responsibilities. Others do not have the attitudes necessary for effective functioning as a faculty member in the "people's college": some are complacent; some are bitter over their supposed second-class status; others are hostile toward diverse students, fear innovations, feel hopeless, helpless, frustrated, and apathetic because of the seemingly impossible demands on them. Still others do not have the skills needed: the ability to communicate effectively in interpersonal situations (within the teaching staff, between themselves and the administration, and especially between themselves and their clients), the

ability to motivate, the knack of diagnosing learning needs and matching individuals with appropriate learning resources and strategies, and the ability to evaluate objectively themselves and their clients' progress.

It is reasonable to assume, however, that in the 1970s' drive toward quality rather than quantity, the number of faculty fitting the above description is growing smaller, those disenchanted with the philosophical bases of this democratized educational institution leaving the community college for other professions, those unenlightened with new developments in the field and in the craft of teaching being upgraded through better pre- and in-service training programs. Improved attitudes, the effects of better indoctrination and training, are reflected in the following statistics: "Ninety-one per cent [of a weighted community-college faculty totaling 69,350] indicated that they were completely satisfied or satisfied with their college while only five per cent responded at the opposite end of the scale."³ But job satisfaction and improved attitudes cannot in themselves improve the teaching done in the "teaching colleges." As Terry O'Banion, Pat Cross, Arthur Cohen and other humanists point out, fundamental reevaluation and redirection of teachers' values, directions, purposes and roles have to be undertaken by individual faculty members and institutions if the quality of the teaching staff is to be improved. As O'Banion points out, "The success or failure of the community-junior college in 1980 rests on the same basis as it did in the 1970's — the quality of the teaching staff."⁴ Development of pre- and in-service staff development is therefore crucial, perhaps the most pressing need of community colleges today. But in light of the diverse purposes and clientele of the community colleges, exactly what kinds of new teachers are needed, what kinds of values should they hold, what kinds of personality traits should they possess? What follows is a brief description of some of the traits I believe

most desirable for a good community-college instructor to possess, traits that I would look for when hiring new faculty if I were a department head or instructional dean.

From extensive reading, contemplation, self-assessment and evaluation of my peers, I have been led to the conviction that, as Charles R. Monroe succinctly puts it, "underlying all successful teachers is the one common trait; he places the interests and concerns of students above his field of study or his outside-of-college activities."⁵ I would not be looking first for a subject-matter specialist, a Ph.D. in linguistics with a full bibliography of articles published in scholarly periodicals. Instead, I would be questing for a student-centered rather than a subject-centered teacher, one who "accepts and gladly works with students of an extraordinary range of abilities and motivations, ranging from the obviously-doomed-to-flunk student who entered the junior college for lack of anything better to do, to the occasionally very bright and even brilliant student who, for reasons of his own, chose to begin his collegiate career in the local public college."⁶ But more specifically what does a student-centered teacher really do? How does he manifest his orientation in action? In a recent article Albert D. Roy, Jr. describes some revealing actions of the learner-oriented teacher:

4. He is careful to provide his students with many successful learning experiences.
5. He knows his students by name and is familiar with their entering characteristics.
7. He perceives the material he teaches from his students' point of view.
9. He perceives his students as being ABLE rather than UNABLE.
10. He encourages students to visit his office and he gives them his individual attention when they do. He is a helper.

12. He complains more about his inability to communicate than his students' inability to learn.
18. He believes in the worth and dignity of every human being and relates to his students on this basis.⁷

That community-college administrators are more concerned with student-centeredness than academic degrees held is reflected in the following quotation and statistic. Garrison reports that the most important characteristic of a good instructor as reported by a dean of instruction and veteran community-college teacher is "a capacity to explain, to illustrate, to interpret a point and a willingness to work with student questions, no matter how elementary they might sometimes be."⁸ And a recent survey showed that administrators overwhelmingly preferred personnel with Master's degrees plus education hours and/or teaching Doctorates over those with a Doctorate in a subject field (53.1% vs 3.9%).⁹ As more evidence of the importance of student-centeredness, witness the following statement made by Garrison in a recent booklet put out by the AACJC for purposes of introducing the community-college goals and practices to incoming faculty:

There are at least five useful steps you can take at the outset of any course — and as long before the first class meeting as possible. These steps demand hard, time-consuming work; but they pay off in making an effective beginning.

1. Know your students.
2. As well as you can, determine their needs.
3. So far as possible, assess their attitudes (motivations).
4. Plot the (probable) direction and rate of their development.
5. In the light of what you have found out, determine clear, near, realistic, relevant, and open-ended course aims. Make sure the students know these aims (and where possible give them a share in determining them).¹⁰

Garrison's bent is obvious — the focus is on the student; the accent, as Pat Cross tells us, is on the learner. But what personal characteristic would promote this orientation? According to Florence B. Brawer, a student-centered teacher ("facilitator" really being a better term) is not a "ladder climber" (one interested in university teaching, one governed by career interests above all else) or to a lesser extent a "job holder" (one who regards teaching as a part-time activity); instead he or she would be a "defined-purpose router" (those dedicated "to the mission of providing the best education for a diverse group of student abilities and interests. These teachers seek better methods of teaching and attempt to organize their courses around . . . 'defined purposes')."11

Closely associated with the student-centered trait and as important a criterion for employment is a fundamental humanism, the belief that man is essentially good, that given the right set of conditions anyone can learn. As Terry O'Banion puts it, "The first characteristic of a 1980 staff member focuses on personality. Research has shown that the effective teacher's personality is secure and open to others. It is, in short, a 'humanistic' personality . . . it cares for man before thing; it is the personality of the learner who helps others to learn"12 (cf. Chaucer's Clerk and my title). In an article published prior to Teachers for Tomorrow, O'Banion gives a full description of those traits that together define a humanistic person. The ideal prototype is the composite of Abraham Maslow's self-actualizing man, Karen Horney's self-realizing person, Gayle Privette's transcendent-functioning individual, and Carl Rogers' fully functioning person. Humanists are open to a wide range of experiences, are democratic, have great tolerance for the ideas of others but still possess firm convictions; they accept, care, understand, support, approve, and love. "They tolerate ambiguity; their decisions come

from within rather than from without; they have a zest for life, for experiencing, for touching, tasting, feeling, knowing. They risk involvement; they reach out for experiences; they are not afraid to encounter others or themselves."¹³ In short they are mature, potent, strong, confident, secure, knowledgeable and "reasonable adventurers."¹⁴ Above all they are aware of themselves, their strengths and limitations, and from years of self-criticism, self-assessment, they have shed immature condescension and narrow views.

The security and adventurousness possessed by most humanistic teachers lead to a third trait that I would look for — the ability to be flexible, creative, and innovative in diagnosing learner needs, selecting appropriate teaching or learning strategies to meet them, and evaluating the results. Concomitant with imagination is a thorough knowledge of a subject-matter area and awareness of a wide range of teaching strategies, an arsenal of techniques that can be employed according to the client's backgrounds, his cognitive map, his learning style, and the objectives of the course. Community-college students are the most diverse of any student body in education; the teaching specialist in such an institution should, therefore, have the most diverse array of content and process forces that can be marshalled into the fray. In short, I am not looking for a raw M.A. with no teaching experience or a former university professor whose academic training was restricted to scholarly concerns. Experience in teaching a wide range of people and/or some training on the graduate level through advanced education courses (an M.A. in a subject field plus several hours in education-methods courses or a Doctorate of Arts) would be desirable prerequisites for a full-time staff member. A student-centered teacher who knows nothing about strategies would not be very effective in the community-college milieu; neither would a humanist who knew little about his subject field.

The last characteristic I would look for undergirds all the rest. Without it the student-centered orientation would lie fallow, the humanistic flow would be frozen, the subject-matter approaches and innovative techniques would stay locked in the arsenal. I am referring here to what Garrison calls a "basic articulateness,"¹⁵ the ability to communicate effectively through sensitivity to semantics, emphasis on the organization of ideas, and respect for the trembling connections of words and the easy breakdown of transmission and reception. A directness of language cutting through academic and educational jargon is essential to effective communication between teacher and learner, between faculty members, and between faculty and administration. If, according to a recent television advertisement put out by AT&T, most systems problems are really communications problems, then the most fundamental attributes necessary for effective management of a teaching/learning transaction are close listening, clear writing, speaking — in short, communication. Without it, the most student-centered, humanistic, innovative and knowledgeable teachers become Delphic oracles, muted authorities whose garbled and cryptographic messages come imperceptively and only infrequently to only the most sensitive.

Perhaps the reader will react to the above list of criteria too cynically, perhaps commenting to himself that if this is what Joseph wants, he'll have few faculty members, that there just are not enough people fitting this description to go around. I, too, realize the fundamental idealism of this checklist; however, I am as firmly committed to promises, to the future, as I am to present reality. Without demanding such traits, by resigning one's institution to mediocrity as some have done, an administrator limits his own creativity, awareness, productivity, and efficiency. And no amount of in-service training will be of much help once faculty are hired who cannot communicate, are resistant to changing attitudes and trends, distrust the

philosophical tenets of the institution, and refuse to meet student diversity in their methods. The weeding out of inappropriate personnel must begin with careful initial selection. To ensure staff quality; to allow community colleges to live up to their philosophical promises of equal opportunity, free accessibility, and the meeting of the needs of each; to transform the institution from an outdated and essentially mechanistic and dehumanistic production model into an organismic, people-centered model: these infinitives will be satisfied only through a greater commitment on the part of the administrators to better staff selection, a process based on a core of values corresponding to the pragmatic and philosophical foundations of the institution. The problems of the 1980's and 1990's will be people problems, not machine problems. Community colleges have to act now to allow their clients to solve them. I offer Edmund J. Gleazer's statement as epilogue to my comments:

Talent finds its way to a promising, idealistic movement like the Peace Corps. It goes to Washington when creative ventures are anticipated. It now follows fresh political leadership to focus on the perplexities of the cities. This is the kind of talent that can be persuaded to help forge a new instrument to reach people who have not known such educational opportunity before and to help break the crust of educational custom. Whether the newness of [community colleges] will be noteworthy by chronology or creativity depends on the quality of staff leadership they can attract. Conversely, the quality of the staff will determine the character of the institution. Nothing is more important, therefore, than the cadre which gives the college its initial [and continued] impetus.¹⁶

Without a stronger cadre of student-centered, humanistic, innovative, knowledgeable, and articulate clerks, there is little chance that the community-college pilgrimage will ever reach Canterbury.

ENDNOTES

¹Geoffrey Chaucer, "The General Prologue," The Canterbury Tales, The Norton Anthology of Poetry, revised ed., eds. Alexander W. Allison et al. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1975), p. 13, line 310.

²American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, 1977 Community, Junior, and Technical College Directory, ed. Sandra L. Drake (Washington, D. C.: American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, 1977), p. 95.

³David Bushnell and Ivans Zagaris, Report from Project Focus: Strategies for Change (Washington, D. C.: American Association of Junior Colleges, 1972), p. 46.

⁴Terry O'Banion, Teachers for Tomorrow: Staff Development in the Community-Junior College (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1972), p. 52.

⁵Charles R. Monroe, Profile of the Community College (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1973), p. 278.

⁶Roger H. Garrison, Junior College Faculty: Issues and Problems (Washington, D. C.: American Association of Junior Colleges, 1967), pp. 16-17.

⁷Albert D. Roy, Jr., "What is a Student-Oriented Teacher?" Community and Junior College Journal, 44, No. 3 (November, 1973), 39.

⁸Garrison, Junior College Faculty, p. 17.

⁹Robert V. Kovach, "Which Degrees for Faculty?" Community and Junior College Journal, 44, No. 3 (November, 1973), 30-1.

¹⁰Roger H. Garrison, Teaching in a Junior College (Washington, D. C.: American Association of Junior Colleges, 1968), pp. 15-16.

¹¹Monroe, pp. 251-252.

¹²O'Banion, Teachers for Tomorrow, p. 64.

¹³Terry O'Banion, "Humanizing Education in the Community College," Journal of Higher Education, 42, No. 8 (November, 1971), 666.

¹⁴Roy Heath, The Reasonable Adventurer (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1964); quoted in Arthur M. Cohen and Florence B. Brawer, Confronting Identity: The Community College Instructor (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 50.

¹⁵Garrison, Junior College Faculty, p. 17.

¹⁶Edmund J. Gleazer, Jr., This Is The Community College (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), p. 124.

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